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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#)1. Mideast
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Key stories in the media:

All media quoted PM Sharon as saying at the Herzliya Conference last night that 2005 will be a "year of great opportunity" for Israel, and that the disengagement plan is the "foundation and cornerstone for the great opportunities that lie before us." For the first time, Sharon proposed to "coordinate various elements relating to our disengagement plan with the future Palestinian government -- a government which is ready and able to take responsibility for the areas which we leave." The media quoted Sharon as saying that disengagement from Gaza does not tear the nation apart, but that it unites it. Jerusalem Post reported that the PA reacted angrily to Sharon's comments, saying he would not find a partner on the Palestinian side for his vision. The newspaper quoted Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) as saying, during a visit to Qatar, that the Palestinians completely reject Sharon's statements. He stressed that the Palestinians will never surrender the right of the refugees to return home.

Ha'aretz web site quoted senior GOI sources as saying Friday that Israel supports a Middle East peace conference planned by British PM Tony Blair for February, but that it will not participate in it. They said Israel sees the conference as a forum for encouraging reforms in the PA. Palestinian, European and American representatives will be attending the conference.

Israel Radio reported that IDF forces made an incursion into the Khan Yunis refugee camp last night, in an attempt to neutralize rocket launchings. The radio quoted Palestinian sources as saying that two Palestinians were killed and eight were wounded in the operation. The station cited the IDF as saying that "five terrorists" were killed. The radio this afternoon reported that five Palestinians were killed in the collapse of a tunnel along the Gaza-Egypt border, and that five others are missing. The IDF is assisting the rescue operation.

Maariv (Ben Caspit) reported that the cabinet vote on the evacuation of settlements as part of the disengagement plan will take place next month instead of in mid-June 2005, and that it will apparently be conducted in a single show of hands regarding all settlements in question, and not in separate votes concerning four groups of settlements. Caspit says that senior Justice Ministry officials told Sharon that the High Court of Justice would contest a vote on the evacuation of 7,500 settlers two weeks before the actual evacuation. In another article, Caspit reported that the Israeli authorities could allow members of Palestinian security forces to carry weapons beyond the date of the upcoming elections, if those turn out well.

Ha'aretz, Yediot and other media reported that the U.S. Department of Defense -- according to Yediot and Jerusalem Post, the department's deputy spokesman Bryan Whitman -- denied Thursday that U/S of Defense Douglas Feith is demanding the resignation of Defense Ministry D-G Amos Yaron. However, Ha'aretz quoted Israeli sources as saying that Gen. Jumper, chief of staff of the USAF, recently canceled a planned visit to Israel

because he was unwilling to meet with Yaron. Ha'aretz quoted the sources as saying that the Pentagon instructed Jumper to refrain from meeting with Yaron, and when Israel refused to accept the boycott, the visit was canceled.

All media reported that last night Sharon suspended coalition talks with the Labor Party, infuriated by comments made by Labor's chief negotiator, MK Dalia Itzik, that Sharon was "groveling" to get Labor in the government.

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that the State Department intends to declare Hizbullah's Al Manar-TV a terrorist organization today, because of the anti-Semitic contents of its programs.

Ha'aretz reported that eleven families have recently moved into the northern Gaza Strip settlement of Nissanit with the assistance of the settlers' movement Amana. Jerusalem Post reported on a budding crisis at the Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories as settler leaders said they were split over whether to call on the public to escalate the struggle against Sharon's disengagement plan.

Ha'aretz, Jerusalem Post and Globes quoted the High Court of Justice as saying Thursday that the government must "thoroughly" examine the problems raised by a law denying citizenship to Palestinians who marry Israelis.

Leading media reported that Maj. Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror, a former deputy head of army intelligence, lambasted the disengagement plan at the Herzliya Conference Thursday, saying it would turn Gaza into a "shelter for Al Qaida." In a separate development, the media quoted National Union party leader and former cabinet minister Avigdor Lieberman as saying at the conference Thursday that he supports the transfer of some of Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods and Israeli Arab communities in Wadi Ara (between Hadera and Afula) to Palestinian control, in conjunction with the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Palestinian lawmaker Hanan Ashrawi was quoted as saying in an interview with Jerusalem Post that the Palestinians should have accepted the 1947 UN partition resolution.

Visiting President of Harvard University Prof. Larry Summers was quoted as saying in an interview with Yediot that anti-Semitism has taken a new, anti-Israeli form.

Hatzofe cited leading Internet service Ynet as saying that nuclear whistleblower Mordecai Vanunu has been elected rector of Glasgow University. In the past, Benjamin Disraeli and Winnie Mandela had held this position.

Hatzofe reported that former Ashkenazi chief rabbi Israel Meir Lau is expected to tell American Jews during his current visit to the U.S. that only in Israel will they be able to guarantee their Jewish identity.

All media reported that Shinui MK Prof. Yehudit Naot, environment minister in 2003-2004, died of cancer Thursday. Yediot reported that Erela Golan will succeed Naot in the Knesset.

Ha'aretz (English Ed.) reported that the chairman of Republicans Abroad in Israel, Kory Bardash, celebrated Hanukah with President Bush and the First Lady at a White House party last Thursday. Bardash, who received an invitation for his work on behalf of the Bush election campaign earlier this year, registered more than 10,000 new Republican voters in Israel in 2004.

The Maariv/Teleseker poll:
-"Should Israel withdraw from the Gaza Strip even if the terrorist organizations continue to carry out attacks?" Yes: 55 percent; opposed to a withdrawal in any case: 22 percent; no withdrawal as long as terror goes on: 18 percent.
-"In which of the following countries is there the most hostile attitude to Israel?" France: 86 percent; Germany: 46 percent; Russia: 32 percent; Britain: 13 percent; U.S.: 5 percent. (Each respondent named two countries.)

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "The Jewish settlements are the main obstacle today to an agreement with the Palestinians. To this historical injustice, not one further settlement should be added." Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Abbas apparently genuinely opposes the kind of violence espoused by Hamas and executed by Barghouti.... [Alas, he] now appears reluctant to just face his opponents in a free and open election."

Block Quotes:

I. "Not One Single Settlement"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (December 17): "The wall-to-wall support that Ariel Sharon has been enjoying recently is based on his decision to turn over a new leaf in the diplomatic arena. This is not unconditional support. The suspicions regarding Sharon still exist and have often been expressed on this page. There is still the possibility that the disengagement from Gaza is nothing but a maneuver aimed at strengthening the Jewish settlements in the West Bank. The recent silence of the settler leadership makes one wonder whether they have been given promises about which the public does not know.... The suspicion is that the government is trying to draw up a new map strewn with Jewish settlement points before the Americans come to the region to draw their own map of the settlements. In addition to this, about 100 outposts that were slated to be evacuated long ago are thriving undisturbed.... any future investment in the development of settlements and their surroundings is unacceptable. This must be the first and most important provision in the coalition agreement with the Labor Party. Anyone who has been following the settlement project since its inception knows that most of it has come about using the method of promises are one thing, winks are another thing and construction is quite another, which is not unfamiliar to Sharon. The time has come to put an end to this. The Jewish settlements are the main obstacle today to an agreement with the Palestinians. To this historical injustice, not one further settlement should be added."

II. "The PA's Non-Contest"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (December 17): "It is widely hoped that the Palestinian Authority's general election next month will herald a new era, one that will contrast the decades that preceded it and be dominated by reason, freedom and prosperity. Unfortunately, the facts offer little evidence that news of this transition has arrived where it was hoped to take place.... As events are in fact unfolding, we suspect that at the end of the day, Mahmoud Abbas will face the same predicament that Yasser Arafat did in his time, when his "election" meant a lot less to the extremists than their extremism meant to him. Abbas apparently genuinely opposes the kind of violence espoused by Hamas and executed by Barghouti, even if his critique is tactical rather than moral. Alas, not only is there no indication that he is actively going from village to village in order to share his vision with the people, and thus touch off a long-overdue re-education process; Abbas now appears reluctant to just face his opponents in a free and open election. As if to shed further light on this setback to the Palestinian democratic process, PA lawmaker Hanan Ashrawi, in this issue [of The Jerusalem Post], tells [a reporter] that democracy is not a prerequisite for Palestinian independence.... We hope to be proven wrong the morning after next month's election, but prospects are high that, like Arafat before him, Abbas, too, will be intimidated by opponents who will enjoy the benefits of maximum authority and minimum responsibility."

2. Syrian-Lebanese Track:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Those who say that the Americans are now preventing Israel from talking with Assad are wrong, and deceiving too."

Block Quotes:

"The Americans Actually Encourage Talks"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (December 17): "The more signs [of Syrian willingness to engage in talks with Israel] and emissaries are increasing, so is the belief that the survival of the Alawite regime is even more important to Bashar [Assad] than the Golan. In other words, there may be an historic possibility that a peace deal could be made with Syria that would leave in Israel's hands strategic security assets in the Golan.... The Americans could have been enlisted for this purpose.... Those who say that the Americans are now preventing Israel from talking with Assad are wrong, and deceiving too.... Not only isn't the [U.S.] Administration not preventing Israel from doing so, but it is even encouraging her. The President of Israel knows this, so does her Foreign Minister (he illustrated this in a courageous speech in Herzliya Wednesday), the Chief of Staff knows this -- all relevant people know this. Ariel Sharon does not have the will, or the capacity, or the energy to pursue two peace tracks simultaneously. This is his right; this is a truth that can't be avoided. This is his perception. One should be aware of it -- for the coming generations or for upcoming commissions of investigation (after the next war)."

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